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War zone

BUSH GETS WHAT HE WANTS FROM CONGRESS; NOW U.N. MUST REIN HIM IN WITH A NARROW RESOLUTION

THE U.N. Security Council now needs to do what Congress wouldn't do last week: adopt a narrowly focused resolution regarding Iraq.

The war resolution approved by Congress was as non-specific as the debate was long. Iraq, since the gulf war of 1991, has not invaded another country. It does not present an immediate threat to the United States. Yet the president has been authorized to use military force ``as he deems to be necessary" to ``defend the national security" and ``enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq."

Some of the U.N. resolutions demand accountability for such things as the Iraqi government's ruthless treatment of its own people. While those actions deserve international condemnation, they do not involve a direct threat against the United States. Do they really justify starting a war?

South Bay Representatives Anna Eshoo, Mike Honda, Zoe Lofgren, Sam Farr and Pete Stark stood strong against the blank check for war, as did Sen. Barbara Boxer. Unfortunately, their voices were in the minority.

Fortunately, the president said congressional approval of the war resolution does not mean a military strike will happen soon. He also affirmed that he would push for Security Council and international support for action against Iraq, as members of Congress had urged. He correctly pointed out that strong congressional support signals a unified American voice -- though that voice could have been just as strong, if not stronger, with a more narrowly drawn resolution.

A pre-emptive strike by the United States alone will be extraordinarily costly, not only in lives lost and billions of dollars spent, but also in terms of international stability. The United States may be the only superpower, but it's not the only country with concerns about the behavior of another country.

How could Washington oppose Pakistan attacking India, or Russia attacking Georgia, if the United States goes ahead with a pre-emptive strike against Iraq? This is particularly troublesome if the perception that Iraq is a clear and present danger remains unproven.

President Bush has found stronger resistance among the international community than he has in the American Congress. The majority of Security Council members now agrees that a tighter U.N. resolution regarding the role of inspectors in Iraq is needed. That is all to the good.

There is great doubt as to whether inspectors will succeed in determining the extent of Iraq's biological, chemical and nuclear capabilities. But without giving that approach a chance, there can be no hope of building international support for later action -- not only for war, but also for the immensely complicated and expensive political and economic rebuilding effort that would have to follow.

